

1/ PRTS

10/507166
DT15 Rec'd PCT/PTO 09 SEP 2004
PCT/GB03/00985

WO 03/078328

1

1 Water Purification Apparatus

2

3 The present invention relates to the control of
4 dispensing of water from water purification
5 apparatus and units, particularly but not
6 exclusively for laboratory water.

7

8 Water purification units for use in laboratories
9 have been devised that remove levels of contaminants
10 to very low levels. They typically contain a variety
11 of technologies that remove particles, bacteria,
12 ionic species and organic molecules. Water is
13 recirculated within the unit to maintain the highest
14 purity. When a user has required water he has
15 typically opened a valve to dispense the amount of
16 water required. A user will typically open the valve
17 fully at first and partially close the valve as the
18 amount of water dispensed approaches that required.
19 This allows the user to make sure the amount of
20 water does not exceed fill lines typically found on
21 laboratory equipment.

22

1 US Patent No 5925240 discloses an improved system of
2 controlling the water output of the unit by varying
3 the pump speed and/or the outlet valve's cross
4 section in conjunction with a timer to give a
5 desired amount of water. Both the pump and the valve
6 can introduce an inaccuracy into the amount
7 dispensed. Pump speed is typically controlled by
8 reducing the voltage applied to the pump and
9 correlation between this voltage and water output
10 can vary depending upon inlet water pressure,
11 temperature, back pressure and any gas hold up.
12 Valve throughput can also be affected by pressure
13 and temperature.

14

15 WO 01/27798 A discloses the use of a flow sensor to
16 determine the amount of water dispensed by a
17 deionization system and charge accordingly. It also
18 includes a safety feature wherein the flow is halted
19 if readings from the flow and pressure sensors
20 indicate a missing/ failed nozzle.

21

22 EP1134190A discloses a sensor fitted to a laboratory
23 water purification unit which measures how much
24 water has passed through the unit. A controller
25 changes the pump speed between two speeds and opens
26 a dispense valve to dispense an amount of water
27 input into the units controller by the user.

28

29 It is an object of the present invention to provide
30 an improved control of water dispensing from a small
31 scale, e.g. laboratory, water purification apparatus
32 or unit.

1 Thus, according to one aspect of the present
2 invention, there is provided a water purification
3 apparatus having an inlet and an outlet, and at
4 least one water purification means thereinbetween,
5 wherein the outlet includes at least a first release
6 means and a second water release means, the first
7 release means being operable at a first flow rate,
8 and the second release means being operable at a
9 second flow rate.

10

11 The outlet may include further water release means.
12 One suitable release means is a valve.

13

14 Thus, the rate of release of water through the
15 outlet can be controlled by a first flow rate, or a
16 second flow rate, or a combination thereof; or
17 further separate or conjoined flow rates if further
18 water release means are used.

19

20 The flow rate of each water release means could be
21 the same or different to the flow rate of every
22 other water release means. Preferably, the first
23 flow rate is different to the second flow rate.

24

25 In one embodiment of the present invention, the
26 water release means operate in parallel. Two or
27 more means could in addition or alternatively
28 operate in series.

29

30 In another embodiment of the present invention, the
31 water release means provide alternative flow paths
32 for water through the outlet.

1 In yet a further embodiment of the present
2 invention, each water release means is independently
3 controllable from every other water release means.

4
5 Preferably, at least one water release means is
6 operable at a relatively slow flow rate of generally
7 up to 0.1 litre per minute, although this could of
8 course be greater, for example up to 1.0 litre per
9 minute, and at least one other water release means
10 is operable at a relatively fast flow rate of, for
11 example, up to 2 litres per minute.

12
13 Preferably, the operation and/or flow rate of at
14 least one water release means is wholly or
15 substantially dependant upon the operation and/or
16 flow rate through at least one other water release
17 means. More preferably, operation of a 'faster'
18 flow rate water means is dependent upon operation of
19 a relatively slow flow rate water release means.

20
21 In a further embodiment of the present invention,
22 the water release means are operable manually and/or
23 automatically, and either separately or
24 independently.

25
26 In one arrangement, the apparatus includes a control
27 means for controlling the outlet flow and/or flow
28 rate through all the release means. For example
29 operation of the control means opens a first,
30 preferably 'slow' rate means, followed after a
31 reasonable time period or flow by opening of a

1 second 'fast' rate means. This arrangement could be
2 reversed at or near the end of the desired outflow.

3
4 More preferably, the degree of operation of each
5 water release means is dependent upon the amount or
6 volume of water to be dispensed through the outlet.

7
8 Preferably, the apparatus includes one or more water
9 pumps. The or each pump may be separately or
10 integrally linked with one or more of the water
11 release means, or at least to the means for
12 controlling the water release through the outlet.

13
14 In a further embodiment of the present invention,
15 the apparatus includes a recirculation system to
16 provide recirculation around at least part of the
17 apparatus of any water treated by the or one of the
18 water purification means, but not immediately
19 required by the outlet. Such a recirculation unit
20 may include one or more pressure-sustaining means
21 such as non-return valves to maintain outlet
22 pressure.

23
24 The apparatus may include one or more alarm means,
25 such as a visual and/or aural alert, to provide a
26 signal for confirmation and/or feedback to the
27 operator of the flow rate of the outlet, and/or the
28 flow rate of one or more of the water release means.

29
30 The apparatus of the present invention may provide
31 for the dispensing of water by any suitable
32 arrangement based on time, volume, etc. Preferably,

1 the apparatus of the present invention allows the
2 operator to pre-set the volume of desired water to
3 be dispensed, and the apparatus automatically
4 operates the or each relevant water release means to
5 provide a controlled (but usually variable) flow
6 rate.

7
8 According to a second aspect of the present
9 invention, there is provided a method for dispensing
10 water from a water purification apparatus having an
11 inlet, an outlet, and at least one water
12 purification means thereinbetween, the outlet
13 including at least two water release means, a first
14 release means being operable at a first flow rate,
15 and at least a second water release means being
16 operable at a second flow rate,
17
18 wherein an operator organises the dispense of water
19 from the outlet through at least one of the water
20 release means.

21
22 The present water purification apparatus provides
23 the operator with the ability to very accurately
24 obtain an exact volume of water desired.

25
26 Where the apparatus includes a control means,
27 possibly with an associated control switch or
28 button, the user can preferably set the volume or
29 amount of water desired, and the apparatus
30 automatically controls the release means, and any
31 included pump(s), to provide said amount exactly.
32 The control means can be pre-programmed to calculate

1 the precise rate of flow required through the or
2 each relevant release means.

3
4 Preferably, at least one of the water release means
5 provides a relatively slow flow rate, particularly,
6 but not exclusively, useable at the beginning and
7 end of a water dispensing operation, whilst the
8 second water release means provides water at a fast
9 flow rate, and is generally more used during the
10 middle of the operation for dispersement of water.

11
12 An embodiment of the present invention will now be
13 described by way of example only and with reference
14 to the accompanying Figure 1, being a block-flow
15 diagram of operation of an apparatus according to
16 one embodiment of the present invention.

17

18 Referring to the drawing, a unit 2 operates with
19 feedwater being drawn into the unit 2 via an inlet
20 and a solenoid valve, V3. The water passes through a
21 series of purification steps and past sensors for
22 temperature and resistivity before being dispensed
23 to an outlet via two release valves V1 and V2.

24

25 When water is not required, the pump recirculates
26 the water to be purified through the purification
27 steps maintaining it at the highest quality
28 possible. A non return valve is included in the
29 recirculation tubing to both prevent bypass of water
30 to the outlet valves V1 and V2 without it passing
31 through the purification steps, and also to provide

1 a system pressure at which the water can be
2 dispensed.

3

4 Water can be dispensed by turning a switch (not
5 shown), which firstly, opens the low flow, trickle
6 valve V2. This will dispense dropwise initially with
7 an audible 'click' for each drop dispensed. As the
8 switch is turned the drops and associated 'clicks'
9 increase in rate, until the unit 2 dispenses a low
10 continuous flow. On further turning, the unit opens
11 the larger valve V1 increasing the dispense rate. On
12 yet further turning the pump speed is increased
13 causing water to be dispensed at a rate up to the
14 maximum flowrate of for example two litres per
15 minute. Pushing the switch closes the valves and
16 reduces the pump speed. When dispensing, water is
17 drawn into the unit via V3. When not dispensing, or
18 when dispensing at a low rate, the unrequired water
19 is recirculated around the loop.

20

21 When the operator wishes to dispense a fixed volume
22 of purified water, he will input the amount, from,
23 for example, 0.1 to 60 litres, via an operator
24 interface on the unit 2 (not shown). When ready, the
25 unit will open the valves V1 and V2 and increase
26 pump speed as appropriate to the volume being
27 dispensed. Water will be drawn into the unit via V3
28 and the flow sensor will transmit the rate of flow
29 to the processor via a series of pulses. The
30 processor will integrate the pulses and from this
31 determine the amount of water dispensed. When the
32 amount of water dispensed approaches the amount

1 specified by the operator, the pump will slow down
2 followed by valve V1 closing and finally valve V2
3 closing. The pump will continue to recirculate water
4 around the loop.

5
6 The use of the two valves and variation in pump
7 speed allows a more controlled outlet measure as the
8 amount of water approaches that required. As the
9 water reaches the fill point of the vessel being
10 filled, then the user is still able to stop the
11 dispense without excessive water dispense. The user
12 may also be able to reduce the flow by turning the
13 switch in the opposite direction so that a slow drip
14 is dispensed as the water level approaches the fill
15 line typically found on glassware.